

Department of Conservation NEWS RELEASE



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State Oil and Gas Regulators Form Office of Enforcement

SACRAMENTO – The Department of Conservation (DOC) has launched an Office of Enforcement within its Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) to enhance compliance with public safety and environmental regulations and the administration of enforcement actions. The office, composed of engineering geologists and legal staff, will work with staff throughout DOGGR to identify and investigate violations and track compliance.

“The establishment of a dedicated statewide enforcement unit – like our ongoing revision and strengthening of certain regulations – is a major component of our commitment to safeguard public safety and the environment as outlined in our Renewal Plan,” DOC Director David Bunn said.

The enforcement staff is armed with recent legislation, AB 2756 (Thurmond, 2016), that authorizes DOGGR to issue civil penalties of up to \$25,000 per violation per day. This new authority was exercised by DOGGR last April when it issued a \$12.5 million fine against a Southern California oil company for major safety violations related to its operation of the Richfield oil field in Orange County. Penalty revenues will be deposited in the Oil and Gas Environmental Remediation Account and expended for clean-up efforts at deserted oil and gas infrastructure. New statutes also authorize the State Oil and Gas Supervisor to allow violators to spend up to 50 percent of penalty revenues on supplemental environmental projects to benefit communities impacted by oil and gas extraction.

DOGGR’s Well Statewide Tracking and Reporting (WellSTAR) database system, which is under development, will improve the Office of Enforcement’s ability to identify violations and track compliance, as well as help to ensure a transparent enforcement process. WellSTAR will include information about enforcement actions and a portal allowing members of the public to file complaints about suspected violations. DOGGR’s website will include a new enforcement policy and information about workshops to receive public comment on proposed enforcement regulations.

The Department of Conservation’s mission is to balance today’s needs with tomorrow’s challenges and foster intelligent, sustainable, and efficient use of California’s energy, land, and mineral resources.

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“An enforcement program with well-defined, consistent, and firm mandates is better for all,” Bunn said. “Our goal is to achieve full compliance by setting clear expectations and standards of accountability. The public can be reassured that violations will be addressed and that we will be transparent in our regulation of the industry.”

Funding for the enforcement program and unit was proposed by the Governor Brown last January and was approved by the Legislature as part of 2018-2019 state budget recently signed by the Governor.

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